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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001443

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [BM](#) [NGO](#)

SUBJECT: A VISIT TO PROJECT OLD SOLDIER 101

Classified By: CDA, a.i RONALD K. MCMULLEN FOR REASONS 1.5 (b,d)

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: INL-funded Project Old Soldier 101, a crop-substitution program founded by WWII veterans of OSS Detachment 101, appears to be doing an excellent job providing farmers profitable alternatives to raising opium poppies in the rugged hills of northeastern Burma. Approximately 4,000 farmers, many of whom previously planted opium poppies, participate in Project 101 agricultural training and/or farmers cooperatives. Emboff traveled to this isolated region in early November, the first USG official to visit the project site in over five years. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) World War Two Vets Giving Back:

Veterans of OSS Detachment 101, after fighting alongside thousands of Kachin Rangers during WWII, initiated an agriculture program to assist their former brothers-in-arms and their families in escaping the downward spiral of opium poppy production and drug addiction. Since 1996 this projected has been funded by an INL grant to the veterans group and has evolved into a highly successful crop substitution program and agriculture extension service reaching thousands of hill-tribe families in northeastern Burma.

3. (C) Stealthy Program:

Project 101 formerly had an American director and a number of temporary American volunteer extension agents, all of whom were ordered out of the country by the GOB in the late 1990s. Since then the program has managed to continue, even thrive, thanks to the stealthy organizational skills and technical expertise of its local director, Ms. Nang Ja. The GOB feigns not to be aware of the ongoing existence of Project 101, although we know that a few mid-level GOB officials have relatives who live in the region and participate in the program. Many of the Project 101 co-ops are formed by Kachin Baptist and Catholic congregations that provide organizational cover for the project,s activities.

4. (C) Kachin Dynamo:

The project,s energetic director, Nang Ja, is the daughter of a WWII Kachin Ranger. She and her dedicated staff of 38 field agents provide training and develop farmers co-ops in northern and northeastern Burma. Project 101 imports high-yield seed corn, fertilizer, insecticide, and herbicide; it then provides these relatively expensive inputs to its trainees and sells them on a cost-recovery basis to former trainees who organize themselves into 20-member farmer cooperatives. The project extends a revolving credit fund to the co-ops that allows members to purchase agricultural inputs in bulk, repaying the loans when the crop is harvested and sold.

5. (U) Poppy Free Pledge:

Emboff talked to many farmers who as recently as 2001 were raising opium poppies. Project 101 requires a &poppy free& pledge from trainees and co-op members and has been a major factor in virtually eliminating opium poppy production from the project region. Farmers claimed they could turn a 100% profit on the high-cost, high-yield hybrid corn imported from Thailand. This bright orange corn variety is commonly referred to as &101 corn& in northern Shan State and fetches nearly six dollars a bushel in this grain-deficient border region.

6. (C) Post-MI, Good Timing for Visit:

Post was very careful not to jeopardize the project by raising its profile with the GOB; Emboff requested and received GOB permission to travel to this sensitive border region to, inter alia, inspect UN-supported projects in the area. Local staff members said that the timing of the embassy visit was fortuitous, given the (temporary?) demise of Military Intelligence (MI) - &we are so happy the informants are gone,& said one 101 staffer. In fact, the dismantling of MI structures along the Chinese border yielded a surprisingly relaxed border-crossing atmosphere. In two different locations Emboff sauntered over to the Chinese side of the border, chatted with PLA officers, and returned to Burma without any Burmese immigration official saying a word

or even looking at Emboff. Burmese Customs authorities, on the other hand, were completely unloading scores of heavy cargo trucks, creating six-day backlogs at some locations.

17. (C) Comment: Project 101 is thriving amid very difficult circumstances and keeping former poppy farmers from returning to their illegal activities. It is doing good while doing well. Besides accomplishing its counter-narcotics goals, the project is also helping thousands of poor farmers provide a better life for their families; many have a father or grandfather who risked life and limb to serve alongside U.S. troops in World War Two. The warmth with which these old veterans, their children, and grandchildren greeted visiting Emboff was striking. Project 101 might serve as a model for other programs fostering U.S. objectives in Burma - despite operating without official GOB sanction. End Comment.

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